

BIOGRAPHY - ESZTER KARASSZON

CELLO

Eszter Karasszon's career as a cellist has taken her all around the world. Despite her young age, not only has she given concerts in numerous European countries – including The Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland – but has also performed in China, Israel and the United States. Music has been a part her life since birth, as she grew up in a family of musicians and received her first instrument at the age of four and a half. “For a long time playing the cello was just a game; everything just happened by itself. I must have been about ten when I realised that music has a serious side, and that was when I started to practice properly.”

At eight years old she won an award, as the youngest competitor, at her first national cello festival, and since then she's been among the prize-winners at numerous Hungarian and international competitions, most recently in 2015 at the David Popper International Cello Competition. In 2016 she graduated with honours from Csaba Onczay's class at the Liszt Academy. She has performed several times, with considerable success, at the János Starker National Cello Competition; and in 2010 she had the opportunity to play before the master himself in Bloomington – this meeting remains a defining moment in her life to this day. In spite of her successes in competitions, Eszter Karasszon doesn't see herself as a competitive type. “It isn't the competitions that interest me in themselves, but rather the music itself. But of course I'm grateful for all the competitions I was able to take part in, because they strengthened an aspect of my playing that I might otherwise have neglected. I learned to step out of my comfort zone.”

Alongside her solo career, Eszter Karasszon has also had a number of chamber music successes, and in 2013 her ensemble took the Ernő Dohányi Chamber Music Competition by storm. They played Brahms' Clarinet Trio, and the performance also caught the attention of András Keller, who invited the cellist to join his Concerto Budapest orchestra. As a member of the orchestra, Eszter Karasszon has gained valuable experience both in terms of her repertoire and her understanding of the instrument, and she has the opportunity to work with exceptional musicians and conductors on a daily basis. Once she accompanied Steven Isserlis in the orchestra, in a performance of Dvořák's cello concerto, and after the concert Isserlis gave an impromptu masterclass at her request.

She doesn't see chamber and solo playing as two distinctly separate areas of her life, however, as for her “all music is chamber music”. Even when sitting in front of the orchestra as a soloist, she still plays chamber; and whoever she's playing with, she always strives for mutual communication. As a soloist she recently performed Dohnányi's *Konzertstück* (Concertpiece) in D major, conducted by János Kovács; and they worked together with a special rapport. When it comes to chamber music, Eszter Karasszon regularly plays with Vilmos Szabadi, with whom she travelled to China for a tour, and recently they gave a concert together in New York. “I learned a lot from him about poise and confidence, both as a musician and as a person.”

She often plays together with her brother, Dénes Karasszon, with whom she shares an almost telepathic understanding. Personal relationships are important to her in every area of music, and she believes “it's not enough to know the music; you also have to understand the other person's personality. Whether you're playing an orchestral piece or chamber music, the old adage that ‘your hearts must beat in time with each other’ holds true”

Lately she's been exploring Shostakovich's music in greater depth, and she played the composer's Cello Concerto No. 1 at her diploma concert in the Large Hall of the Liszt Academy. “I'm attracted to the depth of Shostakovich's music, its sombre or even grotesque world, and infinite sincerity. The performance of Cello Concerto No. 1 was something of a milestone for me, mainly because of the spirit that it conveys. It's always important for me to approach not only the notes, but also the soul of the music.”

The works of 20th-century and contemporary Hungarian composers – Kodály, Bartók, Dohnányi, Vajda, Gárdonyi – hold an increasingly prominent place in her repertoire. She regularly plays contemporary music at events such as the *Hallgatás Napja* (Day of Listening) festival, or the *Arcus Temporum* Festival in Pannonhalma.

She travels a great deal, but is only interested in travel if she can explore the world with her cello, through music. Besides concert halls, inspired by her organist father, it goes without saying that she also plays in churches; but she also enjoys performing at less formal, open-air concerts and programmes organised for children. “I'm drawn to any situation in which I can demystify classical music, making it more accessible to people. Good music shouldn't be confined to the concert hall, it deserves to be everywhere.”